UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/51/442
1 October 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-first session
Agenda item 21

STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

Involvement of the United Nations system in providing and coordinating humanitarian assistance

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "The involvement of the United Nations system in providing and coordinating humanitarian assistance" (A/50/687).

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ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination

I. GENERAL

1. In welcoming the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) notes that some of the actions provided for in the report's recommendations have already been taken or are ongoing, such as the release of, and inter-agency follow-up to the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, and the ongoing work to follow up, at the inter-agency level, Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995. Indeed, many of the issues raised in the report are already being addressed on an ongoing basis at the inter-agency level as part of a systematic effort to improve the efficiency and impact of the humanitarian community's response to emergencies. From this viewpoint, the cost-effectiveness of the exercise would have been enhanced if the extensive interactions that have taken place between JIU and the concerned agencies in the context of the preparation of the report had found a better reflection in the final version of the JIU report. The report also does not take fully into account the fact that the membership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is wider than the United Nations system.

2. Another factor limiting the effectiveness of the report is that the Inspector did not observe concrete instances of coordination in the field. The understanding of the intricacies of coordination in a complex emergency setting reflected in the report is therefore somewhat theoretical.

3. Individual recommendations in the report have been reviewed within the framework of IASC. The Standing Committee's comments on these recommendations, as endorsed by ACC, are reproduced below.

II. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

4. IASC notes that General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, by which the Assembly established the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and IASC, constitutes the general policy framework for the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Since its establishment in 1992, IASC has been involved, on a continuing basis, in the elaboration of system-wide policies for humanitarian assistance response and, especially in refining coordination arrangements in the field, e.g., through agreed terms of reference for humanitarian coordinators. IASC believes that both the Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS) (pre-crisis) and the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) (during the crisis) are intended to ensure integrated and coordinated inter-agency response to emergencies. IASC also considers that, because of the very nature of complex emergencies, an effective and coordinated response requires a high degree of flexibility on behalf of all concerned. This entails practical agreements between agencies - such as those formalized in the memoranda of understanding

between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and both the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund - and the search for complementarities that may evolve over time. IASC therefore sees little to be gained in negotiating a "global policy agreement".

Recommendation 2

5. IASC concurs with the emphasis on indigenous coping mechanisms contained in this recommendation. IASC is currently addressing this issue as part of its response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 through a specific and time-limited working group. IASC notes that existing structures are already used as much as possible. IASC believes that, where national and local structures have been destroyed or damaged, relief agencies should make every effort to assist in their rapid recovery and promote the timely transfer of relief operations from international relief agencies and non-governmental organizations. Finally, IASC recognizes that educational, health and agricultural inputs are critical to the long-term survival and recovery of affected communities during emergencies.

Recommendation 3

6. IASC has recently agreed to an inter-agency arrangement for the use of military and civil defence assets, including the establishment of a Military and Civil Defence Unit located within the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

Recommendation 4

7. IASC recognizes the usefulness of enhancing complementarity and lateral cooperation with the bodies mentioned on matters of mutual interest. It is of the view that this can best be achieved through ad hoc arrangements or consultations between the secretariats of the bodies concerned, as is the case with the current discussion on post-conflict reconstruction. IASC does not believe that there is a need for an institutionalized approach. In any case, matters of interest to the various bodies cited in this recommendation are often brought to the attention of IASC. IASC welcomes the increased cooperation between the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in early warning and its potential for improving decision-making processes within the United Nations.

Recommendation 5

8. IASC is in general agreement with this recommendation. The tasks listed are under constant review by IASC. In certain cases, e.g., logistic coordination arrangements, country-specific agreements have been worked out. Issues relating to the division of labour in relief and rehabilitation are currently being addressed by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions and the IASC task force on the follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56. With respect to subparagraph (e), IASC fully supports learning lessons from past experience. A working group has been set up to review how system-wide reviews could be carried out under the aegis of IASC. At the same time, individual agencies continue to draw lessons in their specialized areas of competence.

Recommendation 6

9. IASC is well aware of the concerns addressed in this recommendation. With respect to subparagraph (c), in which it is suggested that ground-level decisions should receive limited second guessing by Headquarters, IASC agrees that authority should be delegated with a minimum of bureaucratic layers. This will, however, depend very much on procedures within each agency. On policy issues, interaction with Headquarters is obviously required. IASC notes that Humanitarian Coordinators are responsible for overall coordination functions, not for the management of specific sectoral responses, which are the responsibilities of relevant operational agencies.

Recommendation 7

10. IASC considers that the Consolidated Appeal Process is a key instrument for mobilizing donor support to complex emergencies based on inter-agency assessments of humanitarian requirements. Members of IASC have participated in CAP and in ongoing efforts to improve CAP. IASC therefore does not understand, or agree with, the observations on the conditionality proposed for the use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). IASC remains convinced that relief assessments should focus on actual humanitarian requirements. Development requirements should be addressed by other mechanisms, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Round Table or the Consultative Group of the World Bank. Mechanisms for the mobilization of resources for relief, rehabilitation and development and their linkages are currently under review by IASC and ACC. It is recognized, however, that for practical purposes, CAPs may include immediate rehabilitation needs and that it is necessary for the United Nations system as a whole to devise means to strengthen the complementarities between CAP, Round Table and Consultative Group mechanisms.

Recommendation 8

11. IASC, through its working group and country-specific task forces, routinely monitors the status and progress of humanitarian assistance operations under way. Meetings with relevant local authorities to discuss and consider priority issues for relief assistance are held on a regular basis, through the normal coordination arrangements, in each of the countries where emergency operations take place.

Recommendation 9

12. IASC notes that most of the suggestions listed have either already been implemented or are under constant review by most of the operational agencies.

Recommendation 10

13. IASC notes that its members routinely cooperate with and provide information to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs/HEWS for early warning. Cooperation and consultation between agencies with regard to the analysis and exchange of information during crises is already occurring; for example, the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) and ReliefWeb ensure that information is collected, analysed and shared in a timely fashion.

Recommendation 11

14. IASC agrees with the thrust of this recommendation.

Recommendation 12

15. IASC agrees with this recommendation since such additional resources would facilitate the timely response to immediate rehabilitation and transition requirements. IASC notes that CERF is already open to contributions from private and non-governmental organization donors.